

**OPENING STATEMENT OF  
HON. MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS OVERSIGHT HEARING REGARDING  
H.R. 3079, NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS COVENANT IMPLEMENTATION ACT  
AND NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS DELEGATE ACT  
SAIPAN, COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (CNMI)  
AUGUST 15, 2007**

Chairwoman Christensen, Thank you for holding this hearing today and for your leadership on the issues important to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and to the territories.

This is an important day for the people of the Northern Marianas and the Commonwealth's relationship with the federal government. Although the distance between Guam and the Northern Mariana Island of Rota is only roughly forty miles, we are closer in our bonds as people of this island chain we call home.

Our Chairwoman and our staff members have traveled thousands more miles to be here with you to listen to your concerns regarding the proposed federalization of immigration control and the realization of a Delegate to Congress for the Commonwealth.

As we begin this legislative process with this hearing, allow me to make a few observations of my own.

First, in a post 9-11 world, the security of our nation's borders has moved to the forefront of the many issues before Congress, and its relevancy to the CNMI is a very legitimate and salient issue being addressed at this time and in this context.

Concerns have been raised regarding the ability of the CNMI to meet these security challenges, and as with many issues before Congress, this issue has reached a level of interest that demands action, whether it be by this bill's proposals or in the form of another modified plan. To the extent that your leaders and the stakeholders in your community can inform and enlighten us, we would be well served in taking appropriate action and all of us would be serving our national interest.

Second, I believe that the economy of the CNMI should be and remain a central consideration in any bill that makes changes to the current immigration system. To some extent, it defeats the purpose of the bill to have a collapsing economy become the stimulus that would send boatloads of CNMI workers to Guam's northern shores, as has already been evidenced in the past when some workers arrived on Guam after garment factories suddenly closed. Thus, I remain open to listening to a range of views and ideas today and tomorrow about how best and most effectively to structure proposed changes to the immigration system and on how cooperation between the local and federal governments can best be achieved in a way to meet both the security challenges and the economic interests before us.

Third, if the CNMI is folded into the federal immigration system with flexibility for guest workers and visitors, then this may be an appropriate time and opportunity to consider regional approaches to these issues that would mutually benefit Guam and the CNMI. We should consider opportunities for guest workers that may be needed anyway to support the military buildup on Guam that is sure to include benefits for the CNMI. This approach may indeed be one of the positive aspects of the Committee's efforts to address issues of mutual concern, and to realign our economies to take full advantage of the military buildup. In this regard, many business leaders both in Guam and in the CNMI have already begun to consider scenarios that would be beneficial to both of our economies. I urge us to keep these scenarios and possibilities in mind as we continue this dialogue and as we explore proposed improvements and reforms to the immigration and border security systems.

Lastly, let me be very direct in saying that a Delegate to Congress for the Northern Marianas is long overdue. I strongly support your quest for a Delegate in whatever legislation is moving forward, or as a stand alone bill. I have stated in the past my belief that the CNMI deserves a Delegate to Congress not because of the policies or actions of your government, but because of your citizenship and the democratic principles that the Congress is charged with protecting. I pledge to continue working with your leaders until we achieve success and until you have the rightful representation in Congress that you deserve.

I look forward to working with you and your leaders on these issues, and to hearing from the witnesses today.

Thank you, again, Madam Chairwoman, for convening this important hearing.